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Mohammed Tikly – A Gentle Revolutionary is Gone

Mohammed Tikly passed away after a period of illness on Thursday, 12 March 2020. Many South Africans, including members of the ANC and other liberation movements, may not have heard of Tikly. That's because that was the essential nature of the man – a quiet, gentle, unassuming, humble and modest revolutionary. In him there was no trace of the boastful arrogance or ostentatious prancing that is so visible in some of our present-day politicians across political parties.

He was a soft-spoken and simple man with an endearing smile. He dedicated his life to the liberation struggle in our country and to the cause of educational development and transformation.

Mohammed Tikly was born on 7 July 1939 in Polokwane, Limpopo. He was involved in political activism since the age of 14. He moved to Johannesburg in 1953 as a high school student, where he became politically conscious. He joined the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress, the youth wing of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC).

Having matriculated, he left for England where he soon became active in the African National Congress (ANC). In London, he and three other activists participated in a 7-day hunger strike to highlight the plight of ANC leaders charged with high treason in South Africa. During this strike they camped in a tent at Trafalgar Square, which attracted wider attention on the Treason Trial involving Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and the others.

Having been deprived of his passport by the apartheid government, he remained in forced exile in London. He qualified as a teacher and worked as an educator.

After the 1976 Soweto Uprising, and the consequent flood of activists going into exile to join the liberation movement, the ANC established the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania. Tikly taught at SOMAFCO and was appointed as its Director between 1982 and 1987. He spent two more years in Lusaka until the ANC was unbanned in 1990.

When South African exiles returned home, the ANC was confronted with the problem of integrating SOMAFCO students into the education system at all levels in the country. Tikly was asked to head the Batlagae Trust to lead the student reintegration programme and to provide financial support for them at educational institutions.

In 1995, Tikly joined the National Department of Education, where he worked for five years in its International Relations section and later in the Gender Equality division. He retired from the department in 2000.

Tikly served on the ANC's Archives Committee and was instrumental in establishing the ANC archives at Fort Hare University. Until the end, he was an active member an ANC branch in Tshwane. He served as a trustee of the Desmond Tutu Diversity Trust.

Tikly received the Presidential Order of Luthuli in Silver for his contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle.